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Kurdish Terrorists Threaten Attacks Against the Tourism Industry in Turkey

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Executive Summary

According to press reporting, in late March and early April 2006, the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks/Falcons (TAK) issued five public statements reasserting their mission to undermine the Turkish state. The TAK statements, posted on the group's official website, provided justifications and warnings for continuing their campaign against government, economic, and civilian targets in Turkey. In a statement issued on March 31, TAK declared that they would continue to target and intensify their actions against the tourism industry.



In this recent statement, TAK claims that the tourism industry is one of the main sources of financial support for the Turkish government. The group stated that they would target all sources of tourism-generated income including foreign and domestic travel agents and tour operators, and any firm or corporation and their personnel involved with the tourism industry.

Although this statement did not explicitly state that American businesses in the tourism industry would be targeted, all foreign businesses active in the Turkish tourism industry were identified as general targets. Even if not specifically targeted, the American private sector remains vulnerable to collateral damage during such an attack.

TAK's History and Recent Attacks

TAK is a Kurdish terrorist organization that strives to undermine the Turkish state and to create an independent Kurdistan. Media sources speculate that this group may consist of former members of the former Worker's Party of Kurdistan (PKK), a Kurdish terrorist movement that ceased activity in 1999 but actively re-emerged in 2004 as the Kongra-Gel. The extent and nature of these links remain unclear; however, both groups continue to support the same separatist agenda.

As in the TAK "Foundation Statement" released in late 2004, the recent message warns foreign and domestic tourists to avoid Turkish tourist areas. TAK specified that the tourism industry, and not the tourists, was the main target and warned potential tourists to protect themselves by not vacationing in Turkey. The most recent warning also claims that TAK will make "maximum efforts to

carry out serious attacks."

After the TAK issued their Foundation Statement against the tourist industry in late 2004, they did not perpetrate any known terrorist attacks against the tourism industry until April 2005. This time lapse may be attributed to the fact the spring and summer are traditionally the peak season for Kurdish terrorist activity. This April 2005 attack, thought to be perpetrated by TAK, was an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion in the major tourist city Kusadasi. The IED detonated near a statue of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the father of modern Turkey, killing one police officer. Later that same year, on July 10, TAK claimed responsibility for an IED that detonated in a popular tourist square in the tourist city of Cesme, injuring twenty. Six days later, TAK is believed to be responsible for another IED that detonated on a crowded tourist bus in Kusadasi, killing five.



In the non-tourism commercial sector, TAK recently claimed responsibility for the IED explosion at an Oyakbank Bank in Istanbul on March 31, 2006 and for an IED explosion at a crowded Istanbul internet café in February 2006. TAK also claimed responsibility for the vehicle-born improvised explosive

device (VBIED) explosion at an OPET gas station in Istanbul in October 2005.

TAK's Motives and Justification

As stated above, TAK targets the tourism industry because it supports the Turkish government financially and, thus, such attacks are an indirect means of weakening the Turkish government.

In the last few years, the spring and summer months have been the peak season for Kurdish terrorist activity, and the recent public statements may indicate that the same could be true this year (See Hot Topic Report: Kurdish Terrorism in Turkey). Although low-level terrorism is not uncommon in Turkey throughout the year, Kurdish attacks tend to increase along the western coast during the height of the Turkish tourism season in these warmer months.



This series of
announcements
also coincides
with TAK's
traditional
modus

operandi of justifying their campaign and warning their potential targets ahead of time. In the March 31 statement, TAK justified the renewed TAK campaign against the tourism industry by blaming the continuing clashes between Kurdish protesters and Turkish authorities in Turkey's southeast region on the Turkish authorities. Since the funeral of 14 Kongra-Gel terrorists on March 28, numerous protests have escalated to violent clashes in this region, resulting in the deaths of over ten civilians, including three children, and the arrest of 400 protesters. Tens of thousands of Kurds participated in these protests and close to \$15 m in commercial damage ensued.

Additional TAK Warnings

Press reports indicate that in the last week, in addition to reaffirming their intention of targeting the tourist industry, TAK also warned that it would intensify its campaign and use new tactics to exploit present security vulnerabilities. Although they did not expand upon possible new tactics, in another statement on April 2, TAK encouraged women and children to join their campaign. Such a statement may indicate that they hope to incorporate new demographic groups in their future activity. It may also indicate that TAK is trying to expand its support structure in a move to intensify its struggle against the Turkish state.

Media sources also report that TAK warned journalists that they too would become targets if they continue to support the Turkish state. Such a statement reinforces TAK's modus operandi of weakening the Turkish state indirectly by targeting its political and economic support structure. This statement may also indicate that attacks against the tourism industry are only one of many means

TAK will use in this campaign.

Future Outlook

The Turkish National Police are increasing their security presence around major tourist destinations and the Turkish armed forces are increasing their presence in Southeast Turkey in a sustained effort to mitigate the Kurdish terrorist threat. However, even with the Turkish government's proactive security posture, TAK has successfully launched low-level attacks in the last month and attacks against the tourism industry in the past year.

Although the American private sector has not been directly targeted in the past and was not explicitly named as a prime target in the recent TAK warning, all foreign businesses active in the Turkish tourism industry were identified as potential and justifiable targets. Thus, the possibility of TAK targeting the American private sector operating in the Turkish tourism industry cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, in accordance with the latest Worldwide Caution, soft targets, including the American private sector, could suffer collateral damage during an attack in which they are not the intended targets.

Further Information

For further information on Turkey including the Turkey Consular Information Sheet, the latest Public Announcement for Turkey and the latest Worldwide Caution, visit the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs web site at travel.state.gov. For additional reports on terrorism in Turkey for the American private sector, visit osac.gov.

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